

On the Formation of Ashkharhabar

NEVARD A. PARNASSIAN

Yerevan

It is common knowledge that the prerequisite for the historical examination of a language is the elaboration of the scientific periodization of the language in question. The problem of periodization of Armenian, which among other things involves also the formation of Ashkharhabar (New Armenian) and the relationship between Old, Middle, and New Armenian, has always been of prime interest in Armenian linguistics, yet there is no common solution to the problem¹. In this paper the examination of the process of formation and development of New literary Armenian is based on the periodization suggested by Acad. G. Djahukian². According to this periodization, the historical development of New literary Armenian falls into three periods: 1) Early Ashkharhabar (from the early 17th to the middle of the 19th century); 2) two-branch Ashkharhabar (from the middle of the 19th century to 1920); 3) contemporary Armenian (since the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia). This article deals with the period of Early Ashkharhabar, with a special emphasis on the formation of New Armenian. The investigations show that the early Ashkharhabar period in its turn should be divided into two subperiods: the period of its formation (the 17th century) and that of its branching (from the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century), on account of the fact that there are appreciable differences to be observed between the 17th-century Armenian and 18th-19th-century Armenian.

What are the characteristic features of 17th-century Armenian, and which were the historical conditions for the decline of Middle Armenian and for the formation of New Armenian? The unfavourable historical conditions, such as the fall of the Cilician Armenian state, the division of Armenia between Persia and Turkey, the incessant mass emigration, brought about a degradation in 15th-and-16th-century Armenian cultural life. Middle Armenian, no longer a state language, naturally goes through the same degradation. During this period, which G. Djahukian has called the period of evolvement of Middle Armenian into Ashkharhabar, one can observe further differences in the varieties of Middle Armenian, as well as a constant increase in late Turkish-Persian borrowings. Middle Armenian comes to have a restricted usage and finally ceases to function as a literary language. It is during this period that the differences between dialects grow further, leading to the final formation of dialects, and probably it is during this very period that the main differences between Eastern and Western branches of Armenian come to be outlined. In the 17th century considerable changes take place in the social and political life of the Armenian people. These changes, which concern the national consciousness of the Armenian people, national-liberation movements, the growing trade and economic relations between Armenians living in different parts as well as with other peoples, and the establishment of cultural centres in Armenian colonies, made necessary the communication between Armenians speaking different dialects. Middle Armenian had gone out of use, and Grabar, though still used as a literary language, could not serve as a means of such communication, for, being only the language of literature, it was quite incomprehensible to the majority of Armenians. Nor, having greatly fallen apart from each other, could any of the dialects have served such a purpose. The creation of common language, especially for trade and business purposes, as well as for establishing economic, political and cultural relations between Armenians speaking different dialects, was an imperative. The intradialectal colloquial language evolved for these purposes become the basis of New Literary Armenian.

The objective view of the formation process of New Armenian requires a general examination of the language situation in the 17th century. The data pertaining the language situation of this period can be obtained both from the written historical records and from the evidence of the contemporaries.

The first evidence is to be found in the "Essentials of Armenology or Armenian Grammar" (*Ztowt'iwn haykabanowt'ean kam*

k'erakanowt'iwn haykakan) (1674) by Hovhannes Holov, a 17th century philosopher, who testifies to the existence of three "Armenian" variants, i.e., Grabar, colloquial (*vulgaris*), by which he means the dialects, and "civil" (*civilis*); the latter, being the conglomerate of the first two, was used by lawyers. The same variants are to be found also in the 17th-century written records. Here we are concerned with the third variant, the so-called "civilis" which was later called Civil Armenian. There are various written records in Civil Armenian, dating from the 17th century. Up to the second half of the 17th century we have memoranda to manuscripts in which scribes give information about themselves and the important events of the time³. The language of these memoranda is mainly a dialect with an abundance of Grabarian elements, especially as far as spelling is concerned. The scribes, in their desire to sound literary and high-flown, sought to use also some Grabar words and word-forms. Thus, New Literary Armenian is gradually elaborated on the basis of dialects, and it becomes quite widespread in the second half of the 17th century. Besides those memoranda, there are also books on arithmetical, so-called "numerical" art, which are meant for merchants, as well as official documents, estate papers³, addresses to Peter the Great⁴. Due to the activities of the Catholic Church during this period, one can come across also comments on religion books. (Later, at the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century, parallel Ashkharhabar and Grabar religion texts are to be found in the same publications, which had a strong influence on the development of New Armenian.) Thus the newly formed literary language comes to be used in wider spheres; it is not only an intradialectal colloquial language but also the language of official papers and some branches of science. Sometimes it is used in the comments on religious sermons and, though rarely, it becomes also the language of Belle Lettres (N. Hovnatan). This is evidenced also by three books printed in Civil Armenian: 1) "Numerical Art" (*Arhest hamarolowt'ean*) published in Marsailles, 1675 (the author is unknown), 2) "Comment on the Familiar Psalms" (*Parzabanowt'iwn hogenowag salmosac'n*) by Hovhannes Holov, published in Venice, 1687, and 3) "Thesaurus of Measure, Weight, Number and Money of the World" (*Ganj č'ap'oy, kšroy, t'owoy ev dramac' bolor ašxarhi*) by Ghukas Vanandetsi, published in Amsterdam, 1699. The New Literary Armenian language, in a very simple and nearly dialectal form, was used in the letters and account books of Armenian merchants. Among these books, the diary of Zakaria Aguletsi, a 17th-century merchant, written in 1664-1691, is of particular interest⁵.

What are the characteristic features of Civil Armenian, what was its relationship with the dialects, Grabar and Middle Armenian, and what was its dialectal basis? It is this last point which proves to be of utmost importance for the investigation of the formation of New Armenian. (As G. Djahukian mentions in his "Introduction to Armenian Dialects" [Hay barbaragitut'yan neracut'yun]⁶, one can speak about the dialectal bases of literary languages only in terms of the dialectal situation of that period [i.e., the period of the formation of the literary language].) It is commonly accepted in Armenian linguistics that the dialectal basis of literary Eastern Armenian is the great Ararat dialect, while that of literary Western Armenian is the Polis dialect. This has been confirmed also by G. Djahukian, who, on the basis of 100 features worked out by him, ascertained the relationship of two literary variants of Armenian not only to Grabar, Middle Armenian and the dialects, but also to each other⁶. His conclusions are as follows:

1. Though belonging to different periods, the two literary languages have almost the same differences from Grabar as Middle Armenian has, which can be partly accounted for by the diversity of Middle Armenian, partly by the different dialectal bases of Grabar and Middle Literary Armenian, and partly by the conscious approximation of the contemporary literary languages to Grabar.

2. Middle Literary Armenian and Literary Western Armenian greatly differ from Literary Eastern Armenian in the distribution of the differences from Grabar; as compared to the former two, Literary Eastern Armenian has a closer relationship to Grabar in terms of its sound form and is different from it in terms of grammar.

3. Literary Western Armenian is twice as close to Middle Armenian as Literary Eastern Armenian, the grammatical differences being paramount in the latter; this means that Literary Western Armenian being the direct heir to Middle Armenian is closer to it than to Grabar, while Literary Eastern Armenian is further from (Cilician) Middle Literary Armenian than it is from Grabar, which is accounted for by the different bases of Grabar and (Cilician) Middle Literary Armenian.

4. Differences between the new literary languages are almost the same in number as their differences from Grabar, which is explained by their different dialectal bases and the ways of their elaboration (pp. 198-200).

The most relevant conclusions drawn from the comparative study of the dialects and literary languages are the following:

1. Neither of the contemporary literary languages is, either in terms of phonetics or grammar, identical with any of its varieties, let

alone a dialect. This implies that the literary languages in the process of their elaboration have fallen apart from their dialectal bases and have developed common features under the influence of other dialects. It should be mentioned that Western Armenian is closer to its variants and dialects than Eastern Armenian, which is accounted for by the different ways of elaboration and development of the two literary languages. 2. According to the data obtained, Literary Western Armenian has the Polis intradialectal variants as its basis, while Literary Eastern Armenian is predominantly based on the Yerevan or Ararat dialect, or viewed broadly, the variants of the North-Eastern dialectal group. These conclusions, however, hold true only for the period when Eastern and Western Armenian reveal considerable differences from each other. As investigations have shown, the 17th-century New Armenian greatly differs from that of the 18th century. The former was a common language including both Eastern and Western elements; there was no split-up into Eastern and Western Armenian. It was an intradialectal language which in the process of its elaboration was influenced by Grabar and partly also by Middle Armenian. This is confirmed by the fact that its grammatical structure involves common elements from Eastern and Western Armenian, as well as from Grabar and Middle Armenian. Suffice to bring a few typical examples:

1. The present tense of the verb is formed mainly by the particle *kə/ku*, the perfect is formed by *ēr*, which are characteristic of Western dialects, Middle Armenian and later also of Literary Western Armenian. There are also analytical forms in *um* in the present and *ēl* in the perfect, but they are rare.

2. In the declension system the plural genitive in *-i* and the locative in *um - umn* are of common use, and these are characteristic of Eastern dialects, later of Literary Eastern Armenian. The ablative is mainly formed by means of *ē - (ēn)*, this being a characteristic feature of Middle Armenian, Western dialects, later of Literary Western Armenian.

3. Of frequent occurrence are Grabarian words and word-forms, particularly in the pronominal and nominal declension systems, etc.

In describing the 17th-century New Armenian, R. Ishkhanian has worked out twenty features which do not seem sufficient for an overall description of the language system of that period, these features mainly being appropriate for the description of the grammatical system. The 100-feature system worked out by G. Djahukian seems much more relevant for the description of Armenian, as its application, which is done in the present paper, gives us a better idea about

the Armenian of that period and its relationship to the dialects and Grabar. The investigations carried out so far allow us to maintain that in the 17th-century Armenian there was no split-up into Western and Eastern Armenian, nor can one speak about a common dialectal basis. Owing to the economical, trade, and social status of Yerevan and Eastern Armenia (Jugha, Tiflis, Agulis, etc.) throughout the period in question the Ararat dialect undoubtedly played an important role in the formation of New Armenian (the fact that the phonetic system of the Ararat dialect is close to Grabar is not of minor significance here), but it will not be correct to say that the 17th-century Armenian had the Eastern dialects and particularly the Ararat dialect as its dialectal basis, for it includes many important features characteristic of Western dialects as well. Later, at the beginning of the 18th century, conditioned by social and cultural changes (the Venice Mkhitarists and Polis as an Armenian cultural centre on the one hand, the Ararat region and Eastern colonies as Armenian cultural centres on the other hand), New Armenian began to develop on the basis of two different dialects. The 18th-century written records, as well as the first descriptions of New Literary Armenian, are evidence to this. In his "Thesaurus of the Armenian language" ("Thesaurus linguae armeniacae") published in Amsterdam 1711, which is the first description of Literary Eastern Armenian, J. Schröder, on the basis of the structure of Civil Armenian and on the different dialect samples, clearly shows that it is a language derived from um-branch dialects. Sixteen years later, in 1727, in his "Introduction to the Grammar of Armenian Ashkharhabar" (*Duṛn k'erakanut'ean ašxarhabar lezuin hayoc'*) written in Turkish, Mkhitar Sebastatsi presents Civil Armenian being elaborated on the basis of kə-branch dialects. Thus the differences in the dialectal bases bring about the split-up of Civil Armenian, a process which goes on well to the middle of the 19th century.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Aytənan A. *K'nnakan k'erakanut'yun ašxarhabar kam ardi hayerēn lezvi handerj neracowt'yamb ev havelvacov*, Venice, 1866, Vanc'yan G. *Patmakan k'erakanut'yun arevelahay lezvi*, Tbilisi, 1906, Ačaṙyan H. *Hayoc' lezvi patmut'yun*, part 2, Yerevan, 1954, T'orosyan H. *Arevmtahay ašxarhabari cagum 'ev zargac'umə*, Boston, 1961, etc. See also Ĵahukyan G. *Hay lezvabanakan mitk'ə ev ašxarhabari harc'erə 18-19rd dd*, Yerevan, 1954 (doctorate dissertation).

² G. Ĵahukyan, *Hayoc' lezvi zargac'man p'ulərə*, Yerevan, 1964. *Hayoc' lezvi zargac'umə ev karuc'vack'ə*, Yerevan, 1969.

³ Zarbhanalyan G. *Haykakan matenagitut'yun*, Venice, 1883, Lazikyan A. *Haykakan nor matenagitut'yun*, Venice, 1909-1913. *Kalvacagrer ev tntesakan ayl gorcark'neri veraberyal arxivayin vaveragrer, prak 1*, Yerevan, 1941, Hakobyan V., Hovhannisyan A. *Hayeren jeragreri ŽĖ dari hišatakaranner (1601-1620)* H.A, Yerevan, 1974.

⁴ Ezov G. *Snošenija Petra Velikogo s armjanskim narodom*. St. Petersburg, 1898, *Armjansko-russkije otnošenija v XVII veke. Sbornik dokumentov*, Vol. I, Yerevan, 1953.

⁵ Zak'aria Agulec'u *oragrut'yunə*, Yerevan, 1938.

⁶ Ĵahukyan G. *Hay barbaragitut'yan neracut'yun*, Yerevan, 1972.

⁷ Išxanyan R. *Nor grakan hayerenə 17-18rd dd*, Yerevan, 1979.